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AUTHOR	Schafer, Susan P.
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ABSTRACT

In this four-page pamphlet suggestions are provided for conducting school ceremonies which are free of race, ethnic, sex, religious, or handicap bias. Race, ethnic, and sex fairness are addressed in the topics of choosing robe colors, line formation, seating order, listing of participants, choosing speakers, distributing diplomas, and choosing music selections. Issues related to potential handicap bias are considered under the headings of barrier free access and signing. Separate sections of the document contain answers to frequently asked questions regarding the graduation guidelines and choice of bias-free language. (LP)

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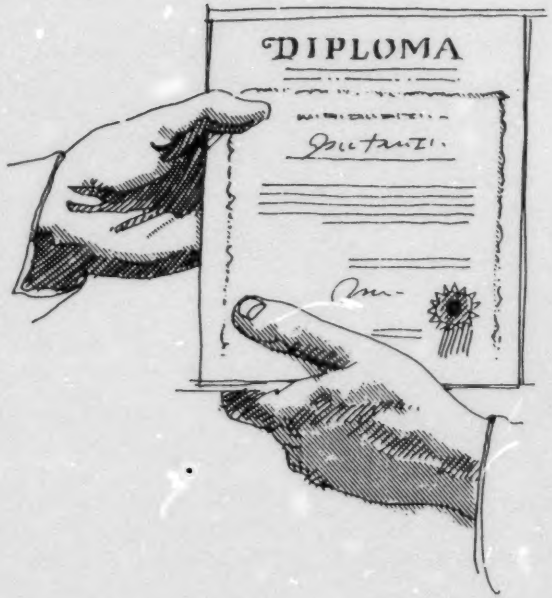
HOW TO PLAN A BIAS-FREE GRADUATION CEREMONY



Guidelines for Planners of Graduations, Continuations and Other School Ceremonies

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THE PROBLEM

Graduation is an exciting and meaningful time for graduates, parents and community. Unintentional bias in the graduation ceremony, however, can lessen this special occasion and make many graduates and families feel hurt, angry and excluded.

THE SOLUTION

- Follow these guidelines to help ensure your school or college of an inspiring, inclusive, bias-free graduation ceremony.
- Celebrate the graduation of all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, religion or handicap.
- Share this brochure with dignitaries and speakers for their awareness and guidance on sensitive issues.

GUIDELINES FOR A BIAS-FREE GRADUATION, CONTINUATION OR OTHER SCHOOL CEREMONY

Robes

Why not have graduates and speakers all wear the same color robe in a school color or in one color? With all graduates and dignitaries wearing one color robe, measuring and seating are simplified and visual unity is provided for the audience.

Both men and women should wear the same color robe instead of men all wearing dark robes and women all wearing light robes. The tradition of women wearing light robes and men wearing dark robes implies that women as a group are less serious and less important than men as a group. This symbolism is outdated and offensive in our modern era of equality.

If a school really wants a two-color effect, consider assigning graduates with birthdays in January-June to one color and graduates with birthdays July-December to a second color. Another option would be assigning graduates with last names beginning A-M to one color and names beginning with N-Z to a second color.

Perhaps you can find a creative method of using two colors as long as it does not emphasize gender, race or ethnicity.

Lines, Seating

Graduates can be lined up and seated alphabetically or by month-of-birth order rather than by gender.

Printed Programs

How about listing graduates alphabetically or by month-of-birth order rather than by "male graduates" and "female graduates"?

Speakers, Dignitaries

Minority and nonminority men and women should be active and visible on the platform in order to provide role models for graduates and for their families. Try to provide student and adult role models reflecting the gender and ethnic diversity of the graduates and of the community.

Distribution of Diplomas

Arrange for a high-ranking male and female dignitary or administrator to distribute diplomas to both male and female graduates.

Signing for the Hearing Impaired

Arrange for a trained signer to interpret the ceremony to graduates and families who are hearing impaired. Contact your school's Special Education Director for referrals to signers.

Barrier-Free Access to Seating and to Platform

Make an effort to ensure that persons with physical handicaps (who may be in wheelchairs or use other adaptive devices) have safe access to parking, seating and to the platform.

Recognizing Diverse Religious Beliefs

Student and adult speakers should be reminded that a public audience is composed of people with a variety of religious faiths and beliefs. Specific denominational imagery and liturgy may indicate insensitivity to the diversity within the public audience.

Musical Selections

If musical selections other than the school song and the national anthem are performed, strive to present selections that represent the cultural and historical diversity of the community.

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE "GRADUATION GUIDELINES"

Aren't these Guidelines "nitpicking"?

Researchers have demonstrated that language, ceremonies and apparel of any society reflect values and shape behavior of that society. The American schools and colleges uphold and practice principles of equality and fairness for all persons regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, handicap, religion and national origin.

Schools and colleges should therefore set a good example of equality and fairness in their daily practices and on special occasions like Graduation, Continuation and other awards ceremonies.

Don't these Guidelines create more work for graduation planners who are already overworked?

The Guidelines are intended to be infused in existing plans rather than added onto existing plans. For example, a graduation planner may know that he or she needs four dignitaries for the platform. Try to invite two women and two men with ethnicity represented among the four dignitaries.

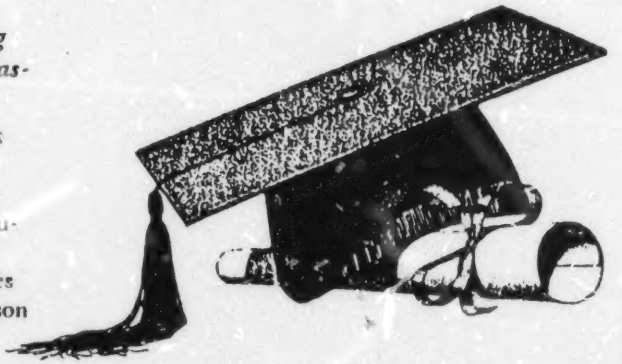
Another example is simply giving the Guidelines to invited speakers who are always concerned about how their remarks will be received. The brochure can help speakers (who are already putting a lot of preparation into their speech) prepare remarks which recognize and honor the diversity within a public audience.

Our students themselves object to changing from a traditional biased ceremony to a bias-free ceremony. What should we do?

How about asking students if traditions are permanent and absolute? Do traditions change according to what a society thinks is right and normal? What role do social institutions like schools play in helping people get used to a new idea? Perhaps the social studies department could develop an interesting lesson plan around this topic.

Shouldn't we be more concerned with unintentional bias and discrimination long before students reach graduation?

Yes indeed! Technical assistance, printed and audiovisual materials are available at no cost to school districts from the Title IX/ Sex Equity office. Technical assistance is available in all equity areas, including **classroom practices, employment, curriculum materials, counseling, administration, athletics, physical education** and **vocational education.** Call or write the state department Title IX/ Sex Equity office for more information.



Professional organizations like the school administrators' and teachers' associations also have equity materials, and numerous books are available in public libraries.

Colleges and universities can contact their Women's Studies, Black Studies and Hispanic Studies departments and their Equal Opportunity Office.

Further information is available from the regional offices of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education.

Thank you for letting us share these ideas with you. And best wishes for a great ceremony! For further information and for additional copies of this brochure, please contact:

Title IX/Sex Equity Program
Colorado Department of Education
303 West Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80204
(303) 573-3338

WEE PALS
BY MORRIE TURNER
HOW COME BOYS GROW UP TO BE MEN ?
YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED 5¢ OR YOUR MONEY BACK
AND GIRLS GROW UP TO BE GIRLS ?
HERE'S YOUR MONEY BACK, MIKKI !

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Bias-Free Language

Mikki in the Wee Pals cartoon has raised this issue of biased language. Can your speakers use bias-free language in their speeches and imagery? Please provide them with a copy of this brochure, and explain how much their sensitivity is appreciated. Then Mikki's question will become unnecessary (and boys will grow up to be men and girls will grow up to be women).

A little planning by speakers ahead of time can ensure bias-free language and make all persons feel more meaningfully integrated into the ceremony; biased language may make persons feel insulted and left out. Some examples of biased and bias-free language are:

Examples of Biased Language	Examples of Bias-Free Language
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen	Good evening, graduates and families.
Good evening, boys and girls	Good evening, graduates.
Board President Mrs. Frank Smith	Board President Alice Smith
serving mankind	serving people, serving humanity
your fellow man	human beings, people, persons
our forefathers	our ancestors, our forebearers
brotherhood of man	community, unity, family
entering manhood	entering adulthood
man of the world	worldly, cosmopolitan, mature
man serving his community	people serving their communities
Even women have opportunities today	All people have opportunities today.
you men and women	you young people, you young adults
manpower	person power, human resources, staff power
businessmen	business persons, business owners
lady lawyer	lawyer
male nurse	nurse
the farmer and his wife	the farm couple, the farmers
the severely handicapped	persons with severe handicaps
the learning disabled	persons with learning disabilities

If gender-specific language is needed occasionally for variety, the language should reflect equality and parallelism between the sexes.

Examples of Non-parallel Language	Examples of Parallel Language
You men and ladies	You men and women
Mr. Garcia and Ann Jones	Mr. Garcia and Ms. Jones or Robert Garcia and Ann Jones
The graduate plans his future	The graduate plans his or her future.
Man and wife	Husband and wife

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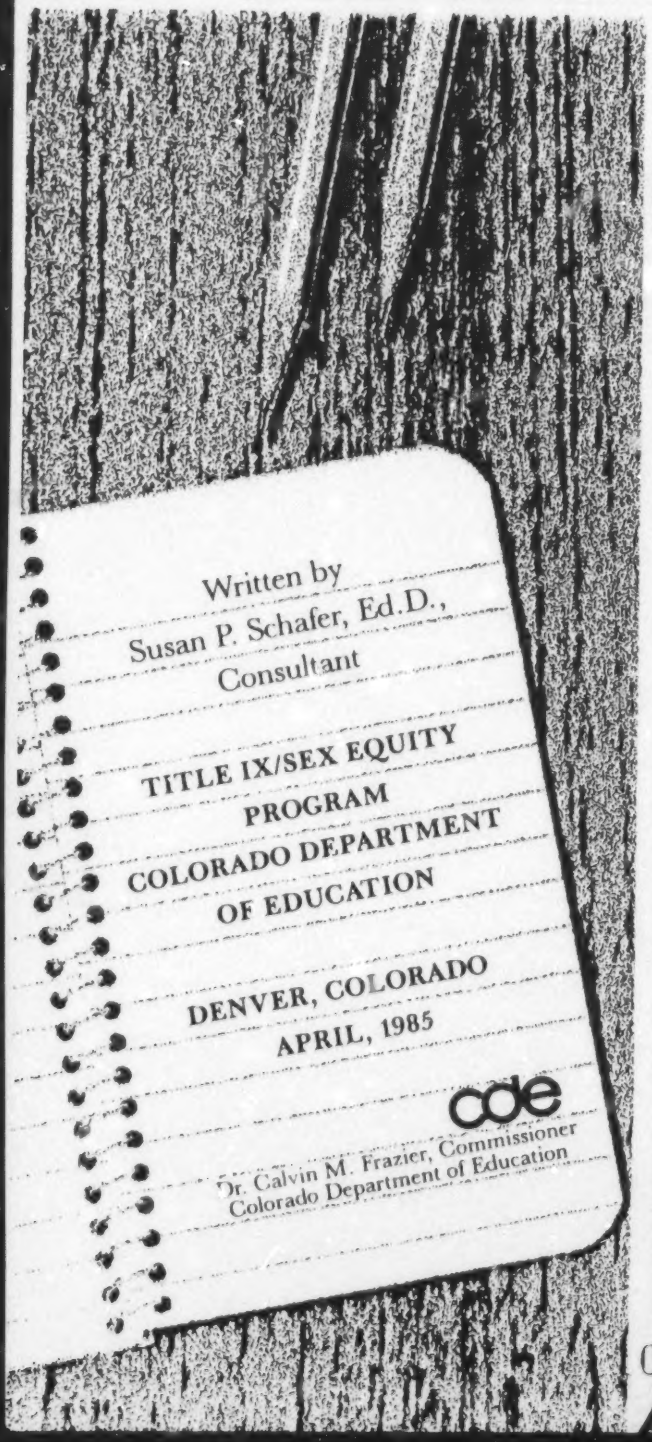

Written by
Susan P. Schafer, Ed.D.,
Consultant

TITLE IX/SEX EQUITY PROGRAM
COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DENVER, COLORADO
APRIL, 1985

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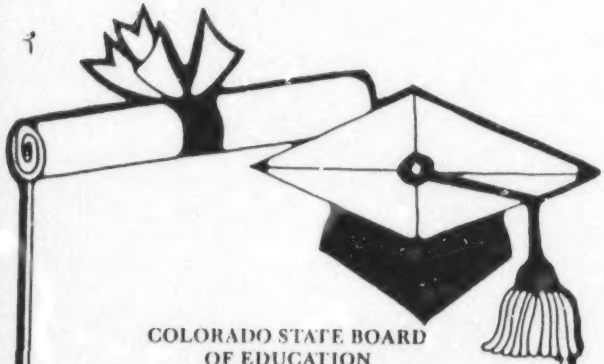
Dr. Calvin M. Frazier, Commissioner
Colorado Department of Education



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